

# The Decision

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A version of this play was first produced by Texas Tech University Theatre.

*A sixty year old MAN. In a nice enough looking suit. Smoking. "Tasteful" diamond earrings and a jeweled bracelet. Thinning hair. Next to him sits a twenty year old BOY. Sunset after a long day. The BOY is giving the MAN a look.*

MAN

So what if I smoke? It's how I grew up. My father hated the Japanese on account of the war. So what? Life does that to people. It's how they are. Did you ever drink a little bit? Of course you did. Of course you did. But you don't smoke? No. Why would you? Dirty habit. So did you ever think of killing someone before today? Ha! Riot, man! Unreal. Immortals, that's what we are today... and five-hundred richer. Not a bad pot to take, eh? I don't think I've ever had better. Everything looks better. Look at that! Look at that sunset! Makes me want to scream! Scream out for life! Can you hear me? I'm not gonna quiet down on account of your nerves. Loosen up. You did a good thing today. Do you need to see it again: all that paper? No? Cheer up, friend. At least you're not older. At least you're not on the verge of death. And yeah, I know these are gonna kill me. So what? I enjoy 'em. I enjoy 'em a lot. Makes me think of my youth. I'll tell you something: if I'm not looking in a mirror I might as well be eighteen. Yep. Eighteen. Nice age, that. Filling up the confidence everyday with a straight razor and a bottle of aftershave. "What's it to you, huh?" – I'd nearly freak myself out saying that in the mirror back then. I don't suppose people are afraid of me now. They don't need the mirror. They don't need the reflection to see the truth of my age – my history – my life as I've lived it. Part of me has a mind to hand you my take, wish you well with a pat on the back, and off myself right here after watching that beautiful sunset, sonny, cause it ain't worth much. The wrinkles don't tell the half of it. The shadows on the hills give a clearer picture than anything on the body. Look at the way they stretch longer across the hilltops as the sun recedes into the distance. Look at the way they...

BOY

Can we just, uh, sit, for a while? Okay?

MAN

Sure, sure. (*Pause.*) Sure.

*A long moment of silence.*

BOY

Why'd you get me into this mess, old man?

MAN

You said you needed. . .

BOY

You ruined my life in a day. An afternoon.

MAN

You don't smoke, remember? You're sitting there breathing the same air as anyone.

BOY

I needed the money to pay back a loan, okay. For school. I was, they were gonna drop me from my classes if I didn't. . . and. . . um. Hmm.

MAN

So you're a student.

BOY

Yeah.

MAN

One of those smart ones with bright futures.

BOY

Yeah.

MAN

Well. . . that can't be so. . . (*Pause.*) Okay. I'm sorry.

BOY

Sure sure.

MAN

Hey now. I just thought I was helping you out with your money trouble, that's all. Don't try to pin this on me, okay. I'm sorry about your predicament but there's nothing to be done now.

BOY

Guess not.

*A moment of silence.*

MAN

Trying to make an old man feel guilty? Trying to make me feel like shit? You're doing a pretty good job. A pretty good job indeed. You're the only one that knew the whole of your situation. You didn't share that with me. All you did was mope around saying how you needed money. I got you money, didn't I? (*Pause.*) Dammit! I was really enjoying this sunset you know. It's all a wash now.

BOY

Boo-fucking-hoo.

MAN

Simple things, kid. I haven't taken off this suit for two weeks cause I don't have anything else to wear. I can't wash it – it says so on the tag – so I'm stuck smelling like one of the homeless – which of course I am – but I try to present myself a little better for the sake of polite society. Don't "Boo hoo" me, you little shit. Don't sit here all smug about whatever life you think you had and were throwing away earlier this afternoon. Don't lecture me about how I *might have* destroyed your life by helping you get some money that you so desperately "can't live without." Don't do that. Passing the blame isn't gonna take it back. Somebody is dead. Period. You're five-hundred richer. Period. You feel like shit. Period. And *you're* thinking: end of story. Only if you want it to be, sonny. Only if you want it to be. You've gotta choose. You've got lots of options. Kill yourself. Start smoking and do it slowly or piss me off again and make it right quick. Or just wait it out – it happens eventually. Turn yourself in. Rat your friend here out. Maybe? Maybe? Take the blame yourself. Forget about it! Build a bridge over an ocean! Spin a fucking globe, close your eyes, and stop it with your finger. Start over or something. Give the money over to a charity. Write a nice funeral card. Send some flowers. Let a peace-dove rise high above the sunset here. Fly a kite! You've got a whole life ahead of you – no matter what you do – if you want it. (*Pause.*) Or... you don't. (*Pause.*) Or you sit there with your head between your knees and your eyes pointed at the ground making the smallest sanctuary of solitude the world has ever seen. Look up why don't ya? There's a beautiful sunset for *you*. This shit doesn't just happen at random, you know. I'm outside a lot. I see a lot of 'em and there ain't many to rival it in the past sixty years of my memory. (*Pause.*) So if you're gonna die you'd better take a look. Whether sooner *or* later – cause you might not see another one ever.

*Long pause. The MAN waits in some pose. Eventually the BOY raises his head and looks. Pause.*

BOY

There.

MAN

It don't restore your faith in humanity, though.

BOY

No.

MAN

Can you live with that?

BOY

I don't know.

MAN

Give it some time. Just promise me you'll give it time.

BOY

But I killed somebody today! I pulled a trigger and all the mechanisms worked properly – just like they were built to – and somebody died... for five-hundred quid! How is that worth it? How is that worth anything? You were the one! You were the one with the bright idea to go into the market after the noon rush on the edge of town. You were the one: with the plan, with the gun, with the ... but I pulled the trigger! My hand did it. And my hand is attached to my head! It's attached to my head and I don't think – I can't think – how did I do it? I ... I did it, I know but ... so many variables ... I don't remember my brain telling my finger to do what it did. The hand listens to me ... It's supposed to listen to me. But it didn't listen to me. I don't think it listened to me. And the thing I can't get out of my head – the thing that won't get out of my head – is ...

MAN

... the fear that you actually just forgot. You just forgot that you were the one who decided. It wasn't a misfire. It wasn't a mistake. You *decided*. You're uncertain about *yourself*.

BOY

Yeah.

MAN

Can I tell you something: You'll never know.

BOY

No?

MAN

You'll never know. (*Pause.*) Can you live with that?

BOY

I don't know.

MAN

It's less about *knowing* and more about *deciding*. The same finger that pulled that trigger, decision or no, can take a lick and feel the wind of change. The same finger that pulled that trigger, right or wrong, need only press itself firmly to the ground to stop this world from spinning ... choose a different place ... take a different path. That same finger can try to place the blame wherever you want it to – even on yourself – but it can't change what's done. (*Pause.*) So what do you want to do?

BOY

Sit ... Stare. Wait. Listen.

MAN

Yeah, you could do that. Is that gonna change anything though? Come on, kid – there aren't any time machines around. No one is rushing to invent them either. The past is the past for a reason. It only gets to be the past if you keep going on into the future.

BOY

Yeah.

MAN

Smile or something – I'm spouting decades of knowledge here... and for free! Your teachers get paid, I bet, a lot more money for a lot less brains. Any one of them ever help you out like I am?

BOY

Not in quite the same way, no.

MAN

Of course not – too busy reading some book or other. Focused on themselves. (*Pause.*) I used to like school... a long time ago anyway.

*MAN takes a long moment to look at the sunset. Without turning away from the view:*

MAN

So, uh, is the five-hundred gonna be enough for you then? For the books or the classes or whatever you were short on?

BOY

Ah ... no. Not quite. Eight-hundred fifty three and thirteen cents.

MAN

That much then? For Pete's sake.

BOY

That's *only* the part that's left. It started much higher.

MAN

Higher than eight fifty?

BOY

Much higher. Two and a half thousand and change.

MAN

That's...

BOY

Frustrating as hell. Tuition kept rising every year anyway. I kept working for extra money and they kept taking it away. "Future money" was the promise. Isn't much of a future now, is it?

*BOY looks into the sunset.*

Didn't know what to do when I got the bill. The "invoice". I got to work asking around for money. Friends: fifty, neighbors: a hundred, grandparents – had to write them proper letters and send them in the post – the money came in though: two hundred. Took an extra job: six an hour – twenty a week – 4 weeks . . . four eighty. Sold the old books for a fraction: two fifty . . . borrowed, photocopied or "pirated" the ones I needed for classes each week – didn't get money but didn't lose it. Stopped eating three meals a day – then I stopped eating two. Funny how "Future money" didn't seem to work for anyone else when I promised them over and over again. Picked up another six hundred doing odd jobs for people in town. Mow a lawn, paint a fence, pick up produce at the local market. All the while money going up, slowly, but as the deadline approached for payment . . . grades were going down. Economics test: sixty-seven percent – now I can't get higher than a C. Accounting assignments: Late – no higher than a D. Statistics, Calculus, and Physics all down. I can't even keep my scholarship for the next term. And don't even get me started on that required arts course.

MAN

I liked the arts. (*Pause.*) You got a good memory.

BOY

Of all the things to be certain of . . .

MAN

Numbers are important. Five hundred pounds, sixty years, two weeks, some fuzzy moments and a couple of hours. (*Pause.*) One single step. It isn't easy, you know, ever. No matter what you do it isn't easy. I just always figured I'd be better off seeing what happened. Catching another sunset.

*MAN quickly retrieves the money from his pocket.*

MAN

Here. I want you to go back to school and finish your education and then go do something great.

BOY

I . . .

*BOY freezes. He can't find the words. A brief moment.*



MAN

Well we're not gonna fight about who's being more polite.

*MAN opens BOY's pocket and puts the money in it.*

MAN

Consider it whatever you want. A gift, a blessing, a *sign*, a curse, a reminder, whatever. Just make sure to use it for something good, okay?

*MAN waits for some response but doesn't get one.*

MAN

Okay. Enjoy your sunset.

*MAN begins to walk away. A moment of silence.*

BOY

Wait!

*MAN turns.*

BOY

Stick around for a while, okay? I can't go home just yet. I'm not ready. I still have some things I'm trying to work out.

*MAN speaks without moving.*

MAN

What are you gonna do?

*BOY looks at the sunset. MAN repeats his question.*

MAN

So what are you gonna do?

BOY

I'm gonna sit here for a while ... watch the sunset.

*MAN waits a moment before slowly walking towards BOY. When he is finally standing very near BOY MAN speaks.*

MAN

Watch the sunset, huh?

*BOY nods.*

MAN

You picked a good spot you know.

*MAN licks his finger and holds it up to the air.*

MAN

I was never a big fan of moving around too much, you know. My life is as different as I want it to be. So ... Can I watch too?

BOY

Sure. Take a seat.

*Man sits and presses his finger to the ground. The both look out at the sunset. Long Pause.*

MAN

World stop spinning?

BOY

Nope. But if it doesn't keep moving we're never gonna see that sunset.

MAN

Yeah ... but we could stare at it forever just like this.

*BOY lifts MAN's finger off of the ground.*

BOY

Let it spin.

MAN

You've run your numbers then... made your calculations?

BOY

No... but it's the variables that make it beautiful.

*BOY looks at the sunset. MAN looks at BOY for a moment. MAN removes a cigarette from his pocket. They sit ... and stare. The world spins.*

END OF PLAY